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COMMENT ON CREATION OF SOVIET HIGH COMMISSION IN GERMANY

The reported announcement by Radio Moscow that the Soviet Control Commission in East Germany is closing down and that the new post of Soviet Commissar has been created implies no diminution of Russian control in East Germany. The control commission, since it succeeded the Soviet Military Administration in 1949, has had extensive but ill defined powers in the political, economic, and military spheres. There have also been fairly reliable reports of Soviet dissatisfaction with East German performance; hence an increase in the effectiveness of Soviet supervision through the separation of military and political functions may well be intended.

The announcement that Soviet Commander Chuikov's future activities will be limited to the command of Soviet troops in East Germany creates the illusion of increased East German sovereignty and indicates a clear demarcation of political and military functions. The move, which deemphasizes the role of the military, corresponds to a similar one taken by the Western powers in 1949.

Placing a civilian in control of the commission will tend to bolster the prestige of East Germany by putting it on a level with the Bonn government. The USSR may also consider that such a change will increase the standing of its representation in any high level negotiations on Germany.

The appointment of Vladimir Semeonov as high commissioner moves into the post one of the foremost Soviet experts on German affairs. He has generally been regarded as the authoritative Soviet representative in Germany during the post-war period.

In the political sphere, the move may foreshadow a Soviet double-play which, under disguise of a new unification drive, will in fact confirm the split of Germany. By giving the appearance of relaxing control in East Germany, the Soviet Union may hope to circumvent the inherent contradiction between the vigorous reassertion during the last two months of the consolidation program in East Germany and Soviet need to support the peace offensive with at least a gesture on the German question.

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The direction which the latter may take is possibly suggested by the coincidental campaign in East Germany to rehabilitate the "National Front" of all the organized political groups. Speeches by National Front leaders last week emphasized both the unity campaign and the need for giving patriotic support to the East German regime. The USSR may thus be laying the groundwork for still another call for all-German elections.

Since Moscow has been pushing its unity campaign with unabated vigor since September of 1951 without meeting Allied and West German terms, few West Germans will be influenced by such a gesture as the mere abolition of the Soviet Control Commission. The crucial issue for them is whether or not the Soviet Union is willing to provide concrete evidence that it will agree to truly free elections and a genuine all-German government. The closing of the control commission casts no new light on the Kremlin's attitude toward these two key unity issues.